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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: BELKHADEM TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER?

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Marc J. Sievers,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

RUMORS SUGGEST THAT BELKHADEM TO REPLACE
OUYAHIA; CABINET SHOULD REMAIN LARGELY INTACT

[1](#)1. (C) According to press reports in recent days, FLN Party Leader and former Foreign Minister Abdelaziz Belkhadem, who is also Minister of State and Bouteflika's Personal Representative, will be named Prime Minister, replacing Ahmed Ouyahia. These rumors have circulated for about a month but are becoming more persistent since last week. Embassy sources predicted that any announcement would be made just before or immediately after the end of Ramadan. Belkhadem has stated publicly that it would be entirely natural that the FLN, the largest party in the Presidential Alliance and majority party in the National Assembly, should have its leader (Belkhadem) as Prime Minister. According to Embassy contacts, the current cabinet would remain largely intact should Belkhadem be named Prime Minister.

OUYAHIA WOULD LEAD PRESIDENTIAL ALLIANCE

[1](#)2. (C) Separately, the political parties aligned with the President announced October 11 that the moderate Islamist Movement for a Society of Peace (MSP) would immediately cede the leadership of the Presidential Alliance, in a normal rotation, to Ouyahia's National Democratic Rally (RND). The strains between Ouyahia and Bouteflika have risen over the past several weeks. Belkhadem, as an eloquent speaker of formal Arabic and leader of the FLN's conservative, Islamic wing, was a big asset to Bouteflika in the campaign on National Reconciliation, whereas Ouyahia's Berber origins and reputation as a fierce opponent of political Islam were seen as less helpful to the campaign. Perhaps the final straw came when Bouteflika pulled the rug out from under Ouyahia days before the September 29 vote by coming out against declaring Tamazight (Berber) a national language. This occurred after Ouyahia had suggested for months that a favorable declaration on Tamazight's status was on the horizon. Hostility toward Bouteflika's proposal and boycotting of the referendum vote were also greatest in areas where the concentration of Berbers was highest.

COMMENT

[1](#)3. (C) Elevating Belkhadem to Prime Minister would overcome the setback he suffered in 2000, when President Bouteflika passed him over as Prime Minister in favor of Ali Benflis. The change would confirm Bouteflika's increasing room for maneuver following voters' approval September 29 of his proposal for National Reconciliation. It also would increase the likelihood that a referendum would be held in 2006 on amending the constitution, since Belkhadem has forcefully advocated adoption of a provision that would allow Bouteflika to run for a third term.

SIEVERS